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REPORT

SUBJECT Organization of and Conditions in
Forced Labor Camps in the Dzhezkazgan-
Kingir Area

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A 12-page report on forced labor camps in the Dzhezkazgan-Kingir area

This report
deals with the organization of Subsection No. 1 of Steplag Camp No. 1 and with
living and working conditions in the camp. 25X1

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Camp Information on the DZHEZKAZGAN-KINGIR Area:

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1. In 1949, Dzhezkazgan (N 47-45, E 67-45) was a small settlement of some 100 small houses, most of which were poorly constructed. By 1954 the town had about 25 to 30 thousand inhabitants. There were copper mines in and around the town which at first were always referred to as Rudnik Dzhezkazgan.

2. ~~XXXX~~ Organization. From 1949 to 1954 the camps in Dzhezkazgan, Kingir (about 40 km northeast), Bay Konur (about 200 km west), and Balkhash were under the command of Colonel CHICHIN, whose headquarters was in Kingir. These camps were called "STEPLAG," ^(stepnoy lager', derived from the term 'steppe') and those in the Dzhezkazgan were reported to be the worst in the whole of Karaganda Oblast. All who were sent to Dzhezkazgan were political prisoners condemned under Article 58. [redacted] Art. 58-6 concerned espionage; 58-16 applied to prisoners of war; 58-1A to Soviet civilians who had been deported to Germany and other countries.)

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3. There were two camp sections (in Dzhezkazgan) (otdeleniya) section #1, which had three subcamps (lagpunkt), and section #4 [redacted]

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In writing,

the first section was represented thus: 1 L/O, the fourth section was: 4 L/O. The first section was about one kilometer south of town, and the fourth about three kilometers north of it. In addition to these two major camps, [redacted] a camp called DZHEZDA. It was southwest of the town and the prisoners in that camp worked in manganese mines.

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4. Section #1 of the camp consisted of three subcamps. All three were enclosed by a stone wall, with barbed wire in front of and beyond the wall. There were four towers on each of the shorter sides, and six on the longer sides, making a total of 20 around the camp. Inside the wall, the ^{subcamps} (lagpunkt^y) were separated by a board fence. Subsections #2 and #3 housed prisoners employed in the copper mines; Subsection #1 [redacted] was for those employed in housing construction.

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5. Each camp section had a small headquarters which was also outside of town.

It was called

"Upravleniye" and was headed by a major. It had an accountant (bukhgalter), a political section, a censorship section, and a supply section (CHIS), an abbreviation of *chast' Intendantskogo Snaabzheniya* (Quartermaster Supply section).

6. Each subsection (lagpunkt) had its own staff. The first lagpunkt was commanded by Sr. Lt. ZHIKHAROV; the second by ^{a Sr. Lt.} ~~Lt. ZHIKHAROV~~; the third by a captain. In the first lagpunkt there were the following sections:

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a. The Special Section (Spets-chast) which handled

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arrivals, departures, and prisoner complaints. It had one free man and a prisoner who was his assistant.

b. The Plans & Production Section (*Planovo-Proizvodstvennaya Chast'* (PPCH)), which organized work brigades and kept records of work performed. It consisted of one free man and two or three prisoner assistants.

c. The Cultural & Educational Section (*Kulturno-Vospitatelnaya Chast'* (KVC)), which supervised films and the library. (Occasionally, after 1953, this section organized classes in Russian or gave some theoretical instruction for chauffeurs.) It consisted of one free man and one prisoner. The library contained around 500 to 600 volumes, including books by Russian classical authors such as Tolstoy, Dostoyevski, Pushkin; translations from the French by authors such as Victor Hugo, Balzac, A. France, and A. Dumas

[redacted] translations from English, including Dreiser (Sister Carrie); translations from Chinese, Polish, and other languages. In addition there was standard political literature by Lenin, Stalin, etc., but these books always stayed on the shelves while the classical and foreign books were tattered and hard to obtain since they were passed from one prisoner to the next without getting back to the library.

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d. The Medical Section (SANCHAST) which was subdivided into three parts: surgery, internal medicine, and infectious diseases. Each of the sections was headed by a woman doctor, assisted by two prisoner doctors and two fieldshers. The head of the hospital was also a woman. In this camp there

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was also an oculist (by the name of Feldman), but this was rather exceptional. At the camp hospital a personal record was kept on each prisoner. Aside from treatment given to the man, this record was also used to indicate the category of work which he could perform.

7. The categories were as follows:

1. Fully able-bodied men--usually assigned to the mines.
Referred to officially as "pervaya kategoriya" or "shakhtery" (miners)
2. Able-bodied men--either to the mines or construction.
("Vtoraya kategoriya")
- 3a. Weaker men--assigned to lighter work.
("Tretiyaya Kategoriya")
- 3 "INTRUD" (invalidnyy trud)--very light work. *("Tretiyaya Intrud")*
4. Invalids--men who did no work. *("Chetvertaya Kategoriya")*

The difference between between Category 3a and 3 Intrud was often disregarded, particularly when there was a shortage of workers.

8. About every three months a medical commission, made up of three or four doctors, would come through the camps and examine these records. Changes from one category to another were frequently made, both upward and downward. Prisoners frequently bribed a camp doctor, usually a prisoner, by giving him 200 to 300 rubles so as to be registered as having TB or some other disease which would procure lighter work.

9. In Camp #1 at Dzhezkazgan

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(NOTE: The "SANCHAST," in charge of the hospital, served the entire camp. Each of the other camps had a dispensary which treated minor cases and contained no beds.) The hospital had 400-500 beds. The hospital had mostly surgery cases as a result of daily accidents in the mines. There were a good many TB patients [redacted] TB patients

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would be treated for a while and then put back to work. They often came back several times for treatment. The hospital had a few separate rooms for severe TB cases. [redacted]

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[redacted] Most of the other diseases had to do with dysentery and other stomach trouble. There was a great deal of jaundice, but little scurvy. Jaundice and TB cases were usually isolated.

SANITATION
10. Subcamp #1 was occupied by 1300 prisoners who lived in four large barracks, about 400 prisoners to each. The barracks was divided into four sections. There was one main entrance and two sections were built on each side with a corridor down the middle. Until about 1950 or 1951 these sections were of very primitive boards. At that time they were rebuilt and each section was subdivided into compartments called nary. Each "nary" held

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four people, two on the ground level and two above. Each man had a personal shelf or night table (called tumbochka) where he could store his personal belongings. When a new prisoner arrived, he drew a thin cotton mattress, a single blanket, and a pillow from the camp supply room. Until 1951 hygiene was very poor. At that time a general sanitation campaign was undertaken. Planks were taken out of the barracks, dropped into hot water, and steamed. After that there were no more lice (~~yesh~~), but still many bedbugs (~~klop~~). They had no DDT. Once a week the prisoners, one brigade (20-30 men) at a time, were taken to the camp showers. While the prisoners took their showers, their clothes were steamed in a special room. The showers and drying room, as well as toilet facilities, were in the center of the barracks. During the winter one coal stove served for each two sections. Winter clothing was issued very late and taken away long before the return of warm weather.

// ~~1~~. There were only three overseers inside subcamp #1 at any one time. They consisted of a ^{Chief} ~~chief~~ overseer (starshyy nadziratel') and two others. They worked in three eight hour shifts. These men were unarmed militia men. No prisoners were hired for this work. (Political prisoners (Art. 58) were never given supervisory or responsible jobs, neither in camps or after liberation. They could be assigned to menial jobs only. Soviet citizens, condemned under this article, cannot return home after completing their sentences. They are resettled in another part of the country.)

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2. Before 1953 the work was very hard and usually lasted from 11 to 12 hours per day. Prisoners were beaten with sticks while at work if they were slack and also for not fulfilling the norm. They received no pay, were not allowed to receive visitors, and could write only two letters a month and those only to addressees within the USSR. Food was very bad and insufficient, as follows: 650 grams of black bread, 240 grams of kasha (served in two portions of 120 grams each), and 13 grams of sugar per day. For surpassing the norm, the rates were increased as follows: Up to 120% of the norm, 100 extra grams of bread; up to 150% of the norm, 200 extra grams of bread; and 200% or more, 300 extra grams of bread. Until about 1951 working conditions were so bad and so hard that many prisoners committed self-mutilation in order to avoid work. They would take an axe and chop off their fingers or a whole hand. Others deliberately broke a leg by jumping down a mine shaft and called it an "accident" (otherwise they were punished). Some would also jump on a board with a rusty nail and let the wound become infected.

After March 1953 conditions improved considerably. The bread ration was increased to 700 grams. Prisoners were paid if they surpassed the norm. However, the amount received was about 20% of the pay earned. The government withheld 50%, the camp withheld 165 rubles for food and clothing, there was a tax (nalog), and a certain sum withheld and placed into a liberation fund (fond osvobozhdeniya).

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On the average the pay varied between 30 and 150 rubles. Before 1953, prisoners were often called out for special work during the night after having worked all day--this no longer took place after the reform.

13. Work brigades and the "columns" (kolonna) ranged in size according to the type of work performed. One brigade normally consisted of from 20 to 30 men, and a "column" of about 200. Prisoners went to work by foot or by truck, depending on the distance to the working site. [redacted]

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[redacted] Each brigade was escorted by five soldiers, a leader and one other man in front, one soldier on each side, and one behind. A "column" was escorted by about 18 soldiers. Until 1953 the prisoners had to walk with their arms locked; after that they walked freely.

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14. Each working site was surrounded by a fence. In Dzhezkazgan, the housing construction area was surrounded by a two-meter board fence with barbed wire on the inside. Whenever a block of houses was completed, the fence was moved. At the work site, there was one supervisor (nadziratel') for each brigade. This man was unarmed and belonged to the militia. Prisoners had no contact with the ordinary city population, but occasionally could talk with truck drivers who brought building materials. Some free civilians also acted as overseers.

WORK NORMS:

15. Norms for every type of work ^{were} ~~are~~ printed in books. However, until 1953, there had been ~~no~~ set work norms. Prisoners

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might get some extra bread for doing extra work, but they showed little interest as it was all too vague. After 1953, when payment was introduced for overfulfillment of norms, the prisoners began to show some interest. There were several types of norms. Some work was measured by time. For example, at a pump a prisoner had to work eight hours and that was considered 100%. He could not earn extra money. Other work was based on individual norms. For example, when digging trenches, each man had his own norm. Finally, there were ~~XXXXXX~~ norms based on the work of a whole brigade. For instance, in erecting a brick wall, the norm for the brigade might be 30 cubic meters per eight-hour day.

[redacted] norms:

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a. Digging a trench with a shovel--five cubic meters per man per day was equal to 100%. This was a very difficult norm and only one man in 10 could fulfill it. However, there was a lot of cheating. The brigade leader could easily write down that the brigade had done 200 meters, when in reality only 150 meters had been completed. There were many ways of cheating. For instance, in construction, a trench might be dug only one meter deep although the plans called for 1.50 meters. Once the trench had been closed, it was hard to check up.

b. Building a brick wall--the norm varied according to the thickness of the wall. For a narrow two-brick wall, the norm was 1.25 ^{cubic} meters per man per day. For a wider wall, the norm was 1.60 cubic meters. The reason for the difference was that when using two bricks, the building had to be very smooth:

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whereas with a wider wall, no one could see inside. Since in brick work three men always work together, the norm for any one group had to be multiplied by three (3×1.60). The accomplished norm was calculated for periods of one month each. The chief of the building organization (khoz-organ) ^(sic; accounting office?) reported to the camp control office on how much work had been done. It was up to the camp authorities to figure the pay due each individual prisoner. (The khoz-organ was part of the government building trust--gosudarstvennyy stroitelnyy organ.)

Quarrels and Escapes:

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tension was high between

Ukrainians and Russians, and between Lithuanians and Russians.

Lithuanians got along with neither Russians nor Ukrainians.

Quarrels among prisoners were due to two main causes:

a. In most camps there are vory (thieves) and suky ^{bottleickers} (sebs). The thieves refuse to do any kind of work and even the guards are afraid of them. They are continually at odds with the suky who are willing to work in order to get along with the camp authorities.

b. Nationalism. Although the nationalities are not separated by barracks, they always tend to stick together. There are often regular ~~xx~~ fights when the groups are about even, or when a minority group feels too much oppressed. Most such quarrels start over insignificant points between two men, each of whom is assisted by others of his nationality. After 1954, there were fewer quarrels because the prisoners had learned cooperation

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during the strikes.

17. In spite of continuous searches, most prisoners managed to keep a knife of some sort, often concealed in their boots. Few knives were bought, most were made by the prisoners out of a file or other piece of metal. Possession of a small knife led to five days in solitary. Possession of a large knife (one that could be used for stabbing) resulted in two months of BUR [redacted]

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Prisoners condemned to BUR were put into small rooms, 10 to 15 people together, and were deprived of all freedom. Their food was the same as that of other prisoners, and they worked by day with the others. Prisoners were sentenced to BUR for refusal to work, possession of knives, or attempted escape. KARTSER or solitary confinement was meted out for refusal to work, sleeping on the job, or tardiness. In this case the prisoner got only 300 grams of bread per day, and twice a day some hot water (kip^{ya}tok), perhaps with a *taste* of coffee, and soup every third day.

18. [redacted] never [redacted] a successful escape. Some attempts were made, however, For instance, [redacted] seven men working in copper mine #31 had dug a tunnel in order to escape. All but two were caught very soon. The rumor was that two men had gone across the desert and had become so thirsty that one of them had killed the other in order to drink his blood. At the stone quarry one man made an elaborate attempt to be

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rescued by his free relatives. He had dug a hole under a pile of building stones and had managed to store enough food and water there to last for several days. Eventually, he hid himself in his cache ~~for three~~ and had his friends pile stones on top. He lay there for over three days, but was finally betrayed when his brigade was put under pressure.

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